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Kublitz, Anja

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Edited by
Martin Holbraad
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The Rhythm of Rupture: Attunement among Danish Jihadists

Anja Kublitz

Introduction

We have spent the afternoon in the basement of a housing project in a Danish town watching YouTube videos of jihadi anasheed (militant Islamist hymns), a sub-genre of Islamic a cappella songs accompanied by pictures that call upon Muslims to take up arms and defend their sisters and brothers. We started out in Palestine before jumping to Afghanistan, Chechnya and Syria. The videos – which were neither chronologically nor causally arranged – echoed each other with pictures upon pictures of Muslim suffering and revolt. After three intense hours, Khaled and I decided to take a break and stepped up into the courtyard.[1] We are smoking cigarettes while we watch the sun set behind the wide green lawn at the end of the grey blocks.

Then Khaled says, 'You know, this is where we expect the buses to arrive.'

'Which buses?' I ask.

'The buses that will take us to the borders when they deport us', he responds.

'Is this what happened in the Middle East?' I ask, sidestepping what I know.

'No', Khaled explains. 'This is what happened to the Jews in Europe. They were picked up in buses and taken to the concentration camps. In the Middle East you are shot next to your house.' The sky has turned red and we are silent again.

Then I say, 'You know, they are also waiting for the buses in Copenhagen.'

'Really?' Khaled exclaims. 'I thought it was just here.'

'No', I reply. 'Behind most of the ghettos there are lawns just like this one, and that is where people expect the buses to arrive.' Then I add, 'You know, in *Mjølnerparken*, the buses actually did arrive.'

Khaled looks at me.

'Yeah', I continue, 'one month after Omar.' ['Omar' refers to a young Danish Palestinian from the housing project Mjølnerparken who, in 2015, shot two people in the centre of Copenhagen in what was deemed a terrorist attack, before he himself was shot dead by the Danish police.] 'One month after Omar, the anti-terror police turned up in large numbers with machine guns and face shields and several big buses. The police formed lines so nobody could escape and chased people out of their homes and into the buses. Then the police searched the apartments. Everybody thought that this was it, that they were being deported.'

'But they weren't?' Khaled asks.

'No', I respond. 'They were allowed back in their apartments, except for two who were arrested.'

We finish our cigarettes and return to the basement and the moving images of different formations of colonial powers – Israel, Russia, France, the United States – and the interwoven oppression of Muslims around the globe and across time. All accompanied by beautiful a cappella songs that cut through the existing political order and, in the words of God, call upon Muslims wherever they are to join the jihad and alter the course of the world.[2]

In this chapter I want to address the abundance of the past in the present that leaves my interlocutors gasping for air but also ripe for radical change. I will try to show the recursive ruptures, which are always new again, and the broken continuities that do not allow the past to remain past but instead make it reappear, reflecting and intensifying the present. Based on 13 years of on-and-off fieldwork among immigrant families in Danish housing projects and two years of fieldwork among Danish jihadists, I want to explore why Khaled and other Danish youngsters have joined Islamic militant organizations in the Middle East.

The jihadi anasheed YouTube videos, I suggest, offer an emic scale of rupture that can be used to understand why young Danish Muslims feel called upon to radically change their lives and set off to war. The videos are characterized by the contrapuntal rhythms of a cramped colonial present (the images) and the voice of God (the soundtrack).[3] The divine words (Hirschkind 2006, 39) emerge as if from nowhere. They are not related to the grim imagery of war and killings; instead the a cappella voices reveal a whole other dimension, where the world is not chaotic,

brutal and unjust but beautiful, coherent and self-evident. Unlike the images of violent colonial and post-colonial encounters situated in specific times and places,[4] God is out of time and place and simultaneously omnipresent.[5] The wider implication of this is that my interlocutors do not refer to the event of the Arab Spring as the Arab Spring but as a miracle.[6] For them, the event was defined neither as being Arab (indicating a place) nor spring (indicating a time) but as being godly. According to them, it was this miracle that made them wake up and radically change their lives. As such, the Arab Spring was able to cut through the existing spatio-temporal colonial order exactly because it was not delimited by space and time but offered a glimpse of a harmony that was there already, perfectly made, and which my interlocutors could choose to join.

Analytically, this chapter thus contributes to the body of literature that is concerned with ruptures as radical transformative events. Inspired by St Paul's miraculous conversion to Christianity and especially the interpretations of this event by the philosophers Alain Badiou (2003; 2007) and Giorgio Agamben (2005), anthropologists have studied Christian conversions as singular disruptive events that through the grace of God 'make the continuum of history explode' (Robbins 2011, 185; see also, among others, Meyer 1998; Harding 2000; Robbins 2004, 2007, 2010; Engelke 2004, 2010; Marshall 2009, 2010; and Bialecki 2009, 2017). Within this literature – and most explicit in the work by Joel Robbins – rupture is opposed to and theorized against continuous, causal, linear time (Robbins 2007, 12). In this chapter I have taken the liberty of using this notion of rupture as but *one* – although widely adopted – example of how change might come about; namely, as the tipping point between continuity as linear and change as singular. Within my ethnography, I argue that rupture takes a different form; that of intersecting rhythms. The difference between Robbins's and my own conceptualization do not, I believe, pertain to different religious cultural forms. Instead, I suggest they reflect our different ethnography, the different questions we pursue and that Robbins – and many of the anthropologists who study Christian conversions – has studied ruptures within singular lifespans, whereas I have studied them across generations (Kublitz 2011; 2016).[7]

That the young jihadists watch jihadi anasheed videos not only of the present uprising in Syria but also of past revolts in Palestine and Afghanistan reflects the fact that although they are born in Denmark, the majority of Danish jihadists are children of refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa, and have grown up in the shadow of the failed uprisings and revolutions of their parents' generations. In other words, if we study my interlocutors' families across generations or

my young interlocutors' sampling of jihadi anasheed videos, it turns out that ruptures are not singular events but recurrent.

Contributing to the present discussion of rupture as an analytical prism through which to study radical transformations (Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma, this volume), this chapter therefore introduces a different conception of change and continuity than that described in the literature on Christian religious ruptures (Robbins 2007; 2011). In the lives of my Danish jihadists and their families, continuity cannot be described as progressive and linear, nor can change be described as a singular disruptive event. Instead I argue – inspired by the jihadi anasheed videos and my long-term fieldwork – that rupture can be conceptualized as the intersection between two contrapuntal rhythms. I have borrowed the term 'contrapuntal' from the field of music, where it is used to describe music consisting of multiple, sometimes opposing, melodies that can interrupt each other. Edward Said used the term to describe hegemonic colonial culture in juxtaposition with its counter-hegemonic counterpart (Said 1993). Here I use it to describe how ruptures unfold in my interlocutors' lives as the rhythm of a mundane colonial history on repeat that is interrupted by the rhythm of recurrent extraordinary counter-hegemonic events. The enduring colonial history (Stoler 2016) is experienced by my interlocutors as a repetition of the same (which is why they await the buses), whereas the repetitive ruptures across generations – such as revolutions and miracles – are experienced by the respective generations as introducing difference.[8]

I argue that the lives of my interlocutors and their families offer a different notion of change and continuity from the widely adopted dichotomist conceptualization. My ethnography attests that people's everyday lives can be so marked by changes (in this case, forced migration and continuous violations) that any continuity understood as a chronological progressive sequence of past, present and future has collapsed, and that radical ruptures can come in series as a continuous repetition of extraordinary transformative events (see also Kublitz 2013; 2016).

Ethnographically, this chapter explores how the Arab Spring and the ensuing uprisings in Syria paved the way for the becoming of European jihadists. The Danish jihadists are part of a larger population of European citizens who since 2011 have set off to the Middle East to take up arms, with the clear aim of overturning oppressive secular regimes and substituting them with righteous Islamic ones. Since 2012 approximately 150 so-called foreign fighters have left Denmark (Center for Terroranalyse 2018, 5) out of a total of approximately 4,000 foreign fighters from the European Union (van Ginkel and Entenmann 2016, 3). Despite the fact

that European jihadists are extremely exposed politically, almost no empirical studies have been conducted among them. Whereas a growing body of policy papers has been released (see among others Bakker and de Leede 2015; Hoyle et al. 2015), scholarly publications are primarily limited to political and historical studies (see for instance Kepel 2015; Roy 2017) and analysis of jihadists' cultural artefacts, such as their clothing, poetry, and YouTube videos (see among others Hegghammer 2017).[9] Taking as my point of departure the cases of two young Danish men who have fought in the Middle East, this chapter thus offers unique insight into the motivations and practices of European jihadists.

Denmark affords an especially fertile vantage point for such a study because, relative to the size of its population, it produces the second largest number of jihadists in Europe (Neumann 2015) and the highest percentage (approximately 50 per cent) of returned foreign fighters (van Ginkel and Entenmann 2016, 29). Furthermore, Denmark has only recently begun to prosecute jihadists, and it has therefore been possible to conduct fieldwork among those who have returned. I present here the cases of Khaled and Amr who, respectively, joined the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Islamic State (IS). I have chosen these specific cases to highlight the similarities of ideas and practices across the spectrum of different political organizations. Although the ideologies of FSA and IS are very different and even antagonistic, my ethnography shows that the choice of which political and military groups my interlocutors joined was more dependent on chance and social network than ideology (see also Sageman 2004). In these specific cases Khaled, who joined FSA, an organization that from its outset was defined by its goal of bringing down the government of Bashar al-Assad, was more engaged in Islamic religious and political ideas than Amr, who joined IS.

Mimicking the composition of the jihadi anasheed videos, the rest of this chapter is structured as a cross-cutting between events that my interlocutors consider to be divine and an enduring colonial present (Stoler 2016). In what follows I will therefore introduce the miracle of the Arab Spring that made my interlocutors radically change their lives before offering insight into my interlocutors' everyday lives, in which there seems to be no change in sight. I will then return to the many changes that the miracle introduced, before discussing how the recurring ruptures are always new again by comparing the current miracle with the revolutions of my interlocutors' parents' youth. I argue that the miracle of the Arab Spring introduced a change of change that not only paved the way for a different experience of time (cf. Robbins 2007; 2011) but also offered an attunement to a divine present beyond the mundane progression of history.

The miracle of the Arab Spring

The day after Hosni Mubarak was removed from power, Khaled decided to quit his criminal activities in Denmark and move to Egypt. Back then, in 2011, he declared himself a socialist. Since then, Khaled has not only stopped his criminal activities, changed his political convictions, lived in Egypt for half a year and been part of the revolution; he has also travelled to Syria twice in order to fight against Bashar al-Assad and has, in his own words, become an Islamist. Like my other jihadist interlocutors, Khaled was neither politically active nor religiously observant before the Arab Spring. Rather he was an established criminal with a good head and a gift for numbers, who at an early age got a central position as an accountant for the local gang and the drug market in his city. Although Khaled was not politically active back in 2011, he became so when the Arab Spring took off. According to him, he simply stopped his criminal activities. 'So you just stopped from one day to the next?' I asked him. 'Yes', Khaled responded, and continued:

> I did. When I was a criminal, you had this idea that people in the Middle East are idiots, and that you have these corrupt regimes and nobody does anything about them. And you had no hope of return, because who had imagined that Mubarak would be overthrown in 14 days or that Gaddafi would be killed like that, and that the people would wake up? Nobody had expected that. Nobody had imagined that. It wasn't realistic. I found out that you should not necessarily think about what is realistic. You should not be limited by what is realistic.

When I conducted this interview in 2015, I thought of the Arab Spring as a political event. Only later did I realize that my young interlocutors do not differentiate between worldly events and God. Two years later, therefore, I asked Khaled, 'Do you remember that you said that the Arab Spring was beyond imagination?' 'Yes', Khaled replied, 'It was a miracle. A miracle.'

In a similar way, Amr explained why he decided to join IS in 2014. Like Khaled, Amr grew up in a housing project. According to him, he had been a troublemaker all his life and was engaged in a number of criminal activities before he decided to turn his life around in 2011. Like Khaled, he describes the fall of Mubarak as a miracle. When I ask him what he means by this, he responds, 'A miracle is something that happens without the human capacity to organize or plan it. It wasn't us. It wasn't the Muslims who planned the Arab Spring. The Egyptians only had to take

one step, then God opened the possibilities … It was obvious.'[10] Amr started to visit the local mosque and explained, 'As a Palestinian, when I started practising Islam, I also brought that, you know, *hamas* along – you know, enthusiasm, the idea that we want to make a difference. Not just talk, but do something.' The continuous onslaught of violence against Syrian civilians by Assad made Amr decide to join IS.

What is striking in the narratives of Khaled and Amr, as well as those of my other interlocutors, is that setting off to Syria is not so much about heading for 'an elsewhere' as it is about reaching for 'an otherwise' (Povinelli 2011a; 2016).[11] The rupture initiated by the Arab Spring is not considered or spoken of as a rupture of reverse migration or of going to war but rather as a rupture of religious awakening (see also Roy 2017, 30). Although all of my interlocutors have grown up in Muslim households and have some knowledge of and experience with Islamic traditions, they were not practising an Islamic way of life before 2011. According to them, the miracle of the Arab Spring took them by surprise and made them 'wake up', a phrase that is not accidental, since Islamic revival is also referred to as Islamic awakening. In many ways my interlocutors' narratives of the miracle as 'beyond imagination' are exemplary of how the event has been theorized – using St Paul's conversion as a model – as instigating an unexpected, fundamental break with what has come before and as paving the way for new modes of being and acting in the world (Badiou 2007; Robbins 2004; Bialecki 2009). Since God by definition is beyond mundane imagination, unexpectedness or shock is evidence in itself of a divine event (Bialecki 2009, 116, 121). As Bialecki writes: 'God is about surprise' (2017, 96; see also Jules-Rosette in Harding 2000, 38; Robbins 2010, 643).

Before I elaborate on how the Arab Spring and God introduced a new world order, I want to show why my interlocutors so happily embraced an event that was beyond imagination. The housing projects where my interlocutors grew up are not places for miracles; rather they are places where even modest changes seem out of reach. Before I return to God, I will therefore introduce the colonial history on repeat.

The block – camp – ghetto

A joint is being passed around. Adham turns to me with bloodshot eyes and says, 'We are non-humans; we are hyenas.' Mohammed continues, 'We always stand here. Every day. If you are first "under the block", you do not get out of "the block".' 'But you got out', says Adham, lighting

up and looking at Khaled. 'You got away.' 'Well … I'm still here', Khaled replies, and looks down. 'That's true', Adham says, 'You are still here.'

'The block' to which the youngsters refer has a double meaning. It refers both to the housing project as such and the concrete balcony of staircase 145, which offers shelter from the rain and a place to hang out. 'The block', somehow, also refers to the end of the world. It is not a place to start; rather it is where you end, where today resembles tomorrow, and where socio-economic mobility seems out of reach (Kublitz 2015). The block is also home, and that explains why Khaled has returned.

The majority of Danish jihadists' parents arrived in Denmark in the wake of failed revolutions and uprisings. Khaled's father was a prominent figure in the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, which fought against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's father. Amr's family has fled twice: first in 1948 when they were expelled by the newly declared Jewish state, and then again in the 1980s after the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon.[12] In Denmark the refugees were settled in housing projects where they still live today, 30 years on – sometimes together with their grown children who cannot afford their own apartments.

Among my interlocutors, there is a profound, shared experience of – despite their families escaping their homelands – never managing to escape the past. This is not only because the majority of their neighbours in the housing projects come from the Middle East and North Africa. More importantly, the relationship between the projects and the Danish state, to my interlocutors, echoes the past and present relations between Europe and the Middle East and Africa, and the past relation between Europe and its minorities. In her book *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (2016), Ann Stoler writes about the trouble with temporalities. She argues that conventions of past, present and future occlude how imperial regimes endure and reappear in the present (Stoler 2016, 35). She encourages us to study the multiple temporalities in which people live (Stoler 2016, 25). In a similar vein, Rebecca Bryant describes how the present becomes uncanny, strangely familiar, when it relapses into the repetition of a traumatic past that does not allow for anticipation of the future (Bryant 2016, 21). The abundance of the past in the present is quite tactile for my interlocutors. Based on my ethnography, however, I have come to believe that the uncanniness of my interlocutors' present reflects not only that the past keeps returning in the present but also that the future is anticipated in the present – just as more of the same. As the prelude to this chapter showed, my interlocutors expect the buses to arrive any day. To them, the past and the future are embedded in the blocks themselves and in their relation to the Danish state.

The housing projects are not only referred to as blocks but also as refugee camps (in Arabic, *mukhayyam*) and ghettos. The many labels do not simply evoke past or distant sites of containment and confinement but are also ways of highlighting the multiple temporalities that are contracted in the concrete blocks and green lawns. It is only because the refugee camps are present in the ghettoes that the Palestinians use the same terms for 'inside' and 'outside' as they did for the camps in Lebanon, and that 'going outside' does not mean leaving your apartment but venturing outside of the project. It is only because the Jewish ghettos are present in the blocks that the green lawns are not only sites for recreational activities but also pickup spots for extermination camps. The ghetto-cum-camp-cum-block, of course, also points toward another present constellation, namely the empire-cum-colonial state-cum-welfare state. During a conversation when Amr expanded on the merits of IS, where the citizens pay taxes and the poor are taken care of, I couldn't help commenting that it very much sounded like the welfare state. Amr simply replied, 'The problem is that when you say "democracy", all I hear is imperialism, imperialism, imperialism.' Amr, of course, refers to the United States' and Europe's – including Denmark's – past and present 'democratic interventions' in the Middle East, most recently in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. But he also refers to the Danish state's interventions in the housing projects, which are equally characterized by policies of abandonment (Povinelli 2011b; Kublitz 2015), such as cuts in social benefits and welfare services, and increasing control and surveillance (Kublitz 2013), sometimes in the form of a kind of colonial care, as when immigrant children are removed from their parents (cf. the French empire's children's colonies in Stoler 2016, 86).

The first time I visited Khaled in the housing project where he grew up, he singled out the 'institution-children'. 'There', he pointed, 'there's another one.' The 'institution-children' refers to the immigrant children who were forcibly removed from their families by the welfare state. Khaled explained, 'You can recognize them because they are a head taller and broader than the rest of us. They grew up with three meals a day: oatmeal and potatoes. We often only got one meal a day.' I asked, 'Was it better to grow up in an institution?' 'No', Khaled replied. 'Those who were put in institutions never got out again. They grew up without their parents, among young criminals. My brother, for instance, he never got out; he is still in and out of prisons, even though my mother brought him Arabic food several times a week.'

Stoler suggests that we think of 'the colony' not as a specific geographical site but as a principle of managed mobilities (Stoler 2016, 117),

where being at risk and being a risk is a fuzzy political line (2016, 121). The block-cum-camp-cum-ghetto is exactly such a formation, where it is unclear and changeable who is the hunter and who is being hunted (ibid., 121). Today in the housing projects, people who belong to rival gangs or refuse to cooperate are not only threatened or beaten but also kidnapped, systematically tortured and, increasingly, killed.[13] The youngsters do not experience that they can get any help from the police, that is, the Danish state, who on the contrary label the youngsters as gang members. Therefore they find themselves caught between the gangs and the police, which my interlocutors also refer to as a gang, owing to their form of organization and violent practices. The youths' practices of guarding the neighbourhood, their experiences with confinement and their parents' experience of being unable to protect their children all echo and replicate the families' previous experiences with wars (Kublitz 2013).

It is against this backdrop of a claustrophobic present – where previous and current constellations of force and fear have turned the present and the anticipated future into bare repetitions of the past (Bryant 2016; Deleuze 2009, 24) – that my young interlocutors received the uprisings in the Middle East as a miracle that radically changed the world and introduced new avenues for action.[14]

Striving in the way of Allah

According to my jihadist interlocutors, the fall of Mubarak and the subsequent uprisings in the Middle East made them radically change their lives or, as some of them phrase it, made them 'wake up'. Today they explain their previous criminal activities as the result of growing up in a capitalist society that primarily values the pursuit of money, a kind of false consciousness. My interlocutors, though, did not turn toward Marx but toward God (cf. Kublitz 2016). Whereas the European states tend to focus on the young people's movement to the Middle East, the individuals themselves consider their journey as just one way of striving in the way of Allah (jihad). The Arab Spring did not just set my interlocutors on the move to the Middle East but made them start praying, join humanitarian organizations and engage in community work. When they did join various political and militant organizations in the Middle East, their primary goal was not to take up arms but to alleviate the suffering of their Muslim brothers and sisters, and to join the struggle for a new Islamic order. And they were not disappointed. Khaled joined a faction under the Free Syrian Army and, although food was scarce, he was elevated by his

many conversations with brothers from all over the world. They spent most of their time smoking cigarettes and discussing how they would liberate Muslims and create a future Islamic order. Amr, who joined IS, was impressed by how he and other foreign jihadists were welcomed by the local citizens, by how organized IS was, the low crime rate, and the firm but just law enforcement. Khaled returned to Denmark because he realized that the revolution would take years and because he wanted to take a course in journalism that would equip him with qualifications that are in demand by the militant organization in Syria. Amr returned because he missed his fiancée.

Today Amr has given up his criminal activities. He is now married, attends a mosque, works for a cleaning company, and is striving daily to improve his *iman* (faith). As he explains, 'You know, sometimes it goes up, sometimes it goes down, sometimes it is stronger, sometimes it is weaker. Right now it is OK, but it could be better. It has to go a little bit more up before it … you know.' Khaled is back at the block, although not as a drug dealer. Instead, he runs free workshops on art and photography for other young people. Like Amr, he is striving to improve his faith and make up for his past misdeeds.

To my interlocutors, the Arab Spring introduced a rupture, a break in the current contraction of past, present and future that allowed for both personal redemption and a radically different experience of time (cf. Marshall 2009). As such, my interlocutors' transformations resemble other conversion stories that highlight the intervention of God and the event, especially Joel Robbins's description of Pentecostal conversions (Robbins 2011; 2010; 2007). Robbins, however, describes conversion among the Upramin as a rupture that renders the present disjointed from the past (Robbins 2010, 637). The miracle of the Arab Spring was that it rendered the future disjointed from the present. To my interlocutors, the events of the Arab Spring introduced a cut in the existing social relations that made my interlocutors see God's actions and plans and allowed them to imagine a new political order. Not unlike the a cappella songs in the jihadi anasheed videos, the miracle of the Arab Spring created a caesura in the stalemate of the present and introduced a different future that did not replicate the past. As Khaled states, 'I believe that the whole world is in the midst of a spiritual evolution. What happens in the Middle East is because of this. *Yani* [you know], I dare, I do not fear anymore, I can. I believe in justice. It's an avalanche and it's not gonna stop. Most Muslims are convinced that we will rule the new world order.' Or in Amr's words, 'From an Islamic point of view, it is perfect that all the refugees arrive now. In 20 years from now, somebody else will rule Denmark …

Venligboerne [meaning 'the friendly people', a civil movement welcoming refugees in Denmark] are sweet, but what are they going to offer? Nude bathing? Soon the refugees will understand the system here and they will turn toward Islam.'

The miracle and the revolution

What surprised me the most when I started out my current fieldwork in 2015 was my interlocutors' optimism. I had expected to meet disenchanted returned jihadists who, confronted with the brutality and opportunism of war, had decided to return home. But this is not what I found. And although time has left a ruined Syria, a severely diminished IS, and a Gaza that is deemed 'unlivable' by the UN, the spirit of my interlocutors has not declined. The reason for this, I believe, is the rupture that the miracle of the Arab Spring sparked. On an individual level, my interlocutors underwent a change when they stopped pursuing profit through selling drugs and other criminal activities and instead started pursuing *iman* (faith) through helping their sisters and brothers, attending mosque, and building an Islamic state. Although both profit and faith can be quantified and are somewhat precarious in that you can gain or lose them (Mittermaier 2013), they nevertheless involve radically different practices and world views.

I do not believe, however, that this turn toward faith in itself explains why my interlocutors are happy with the current state of the world. Rather, I have come to believe that their optimistic stance reflects the miracle as a specific change of change in itself (Højer et al. 2018). Whereas the interlocutors and I can easily agree that the revolutions of their parents failed, they look totally baffled when I refer to the current developments as failures. If revolution is history's locomotive – following Martin Malia (2006) and Reinhardt Kosseleck (2004) – the revolutions of their parents failed because history ended up repeating itself. In the specific cases of Khaled and Amr, the generation of Khaled's parents did not succeed in overthrowing Syrian president Hafez al-Assad. On the contrary his son, Bashar al-Assad, has committed even worse crimes against the Syrian population than his father did during his lifetime. Similarly, the Palestinian revolution led by the generation of Amr's parents did not succeed in challenging the occupation by Israel, whose stranglehold on the occupied Palestinian territories has only increased as the Palestinian political leadership has collapsed. If the uprisings and revolutions of my interlocutors' parents were supposed to move history forward, the Arab

Spring, on the other hand, was received by my interlocutors as a miracle, a messianic event, because it pulled the brake on the locomotive of history and made history on repeat explode – to paraphrase Robbins's reading of Walter Benjamin (Robbins 2011, 185). To my interlocutors, the miracle of the Arab Spring was not that it moved history ahead but that it offered a glimpse of a divine world that was there already, perfectly made, and which my interlocutors could choose to join. Unlike the revolution, the miracle offered attunement to a divine present beyond the mundane progression of history. Having lost faith in the world, my interlocutors started believing in God.

Today my interlocutors' practices are characterized by both an urgent need to act and a more laid-back attitude, reflecting temporalities that we might call *immediacy* and *telos*. On the one hand, these youngsters are immediately affected by violent events, which they think of as urgent potentialities to restore justice and worship God. Simultaneously, many understand their current actions through the future Islamic governance that inevitably will come. These two perspectives are not exclusive. When I asked Khaled why one should bother to fight in Syria, or do other good deeds, if an Islamic order was going to arrive anyway, he explained, 'If you want to fly, you can stand like this [both legs solidly planted on the ground], but you can also lift one of your legs, like this. Then you are already halfway there.'[15] Standing on one leg with his arms reaching for the skies, Khaled is ready for take off. The recent political developments, with Brexit and Trump, have convinced my interlocutors that the End of Time (*Akhir al-zaman*) is near (see Greenhouse, this volume). And who knows? Maybe this miracle that comes as a whole new configuration of God and brutal practices of justice will topple the world and once and for all abolish the current political order. Or maybe Khaled has gone nowhere, but is just the son of an immigrant, trying to keep his balance in the basement of a ghetto while he repeats the tragedy of his parents. What I do know is that, to my interlocutors, the revolutions might have come to an end (Haugbølle and Bandak 2017), but the miracle has just begun.

The rhythm of rupture

In the basement of a Danish housing project, Khaled and I are watching another jihadi anasheed video, this time of a gloomy, endless desert with no trees or buildings in sight. In the midst of the sand dunes, a young man in his twenties is sitting dressed in a traditional white Afghan outfit of loose

linen trousers, a tunic and a folded turban, a Kalashnikov lying casually in his lap. The chorus fades out as the camera zooms in on the young man, who is quietly crying. In eloquent Arabic he bemoans that he had to leave his mother. Khaled turns towards me and says, 'Most people cry when they watch this video. It is very hard to leave your mother.'

In an article on the genealogy of jihadi anasheed, Behnam Said traces the poetry of the contemporary militant hymns. According to him, the jihadist poetry brought forth in the Islamist hymns can be seen as an extension of a nineteenth-century anti-colonial poetry style. Furthermore, the many anasheed used today in videos by militant Islamic organizations can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, the decades that are known as the era of Islamic resurrection (Said 2012, 865; see also Hirschkind 2006). Mirroring Said's historical analysis of jihadi anasheed, my ethnography on Danish jihadists questions whether one can understand the latest rupture of the Arab Spring as a clear-cut break with the past (Robbins 2011; Engelke 2004; Meyer 1998).

Although my young interlocutors distance themselves from their parents and do their best to get rid of 'the muck of the past' (Shah 2014; see also Kublitz 2011) by refusing to recognize any resemblance whatsoever between their parents' failed revolutions and the current miracle, I do not believe that this should lead us to conceptualize this latest rupture as a singular event. The jihadi anasheed videos give them away. Not only does the composition of the videos that display the present uprisings and military battles in Syria mimic the composition of the many other jihadi anasheed videos from past battlefields in Palestine, Chechnya and Afghanistan (Said 2012), but my interlocutors also view them as one batch, in a non-chronological order, and do not distinguish them according to where or when they took place but according to the intensity of affect they cause, such as whether they make you cry (see also Hirschkind 2012). If we zoom out from the singular radical rupture within a specific life span and observe ruptures across generations – or through the practice of watching jihad anasheed videos – the multiple ruptures come across as a repetitive rhythm. My ethnography, therefore, questions not only the young interlocutors' emic understanding that they are embarking on a fundamentally different journey from that of their parents, but also current theories that celebrate ruptures as *singular* moments of radical discontinuity (Badiou 2007; Robbins 2004). Although each rupture does introduce a radical change to the history on repeat, the ethnography indicates that they are also recurrent. The question then becomes, how can each rupture be at once new, as my interlocutors insist, and recurrent?

The answer, I believe, is that the singular ruptures are related exactly by way of the affect they cause – the difference they enforce in the world. In this way, my ethnography is more aligned with a Deleuzian reading of change than that of a Badiouan. Whereas Alain Badiou argues that change emerges through events that give birth to the new (Badiou 2007), Gilles Deleuze argues that change comes about through repetitions that introduce a difference in kind (Deleuze 2009). In the lives of my interlocutors the singular rupture is defined as such because it introduces a change that attempts to overthrow the history on repeat. Whereas this change has to be a change of change in order to come across as new in relation to previous ruptures – like the difference between a miracle and a revolution – the singular rupture is nevertheless related by exploding the history on repeat. Secondly, the multiple ruptures are related and recognizable by way of their form: through the events of violent uprisings. If one removed the soundtrack and texts from the jihadi anasheed videos, the pictures themselves would come across as interchangeable. The single rupture, in other words, does not only come as a surprise, in the sense that it is unexpected, but also has to be recognizable. When my interlocutors so radically and happily turned their lives upside down in the wake of the Arab Spring, it was not only because the miracle offered them a way out of their current predicament, but also because they recognized it as an event that could potentially change the world as they knew it – just as the jihadi anasheed songs are each distinct but nevertheless adhere to the same rhythm and pitch (Said 2012; Pieslak 2017), or as the rhythm of rupture is repeated with a difference across generations.

Inspired by the miraculous event of St Paul, Christian religious ruptures have been conceptualized as singular and in opposition to history as continuous and linear (Robbins 2007; 2011). My ethnography offers a quite different conceptualization of rupture. In the lives of my Danish jihadists' families, continuity cannot be described as progressive and linear, nor can change be described as a singular disruptive event. Instead I suggest that rupture can be conceptualized as the recurring intersections between two contrapuntal rhythms: the rhythm of a colonial history on repeat and the rhythm of anti-colonial struggles. It is important for me to underline that the notion of history on repeat does not refer to an exotic mythical time (Lévi-Strauss 1966), but is the tragic outcome of the broken continuities of my interlocutors' lives, where past, present and future violations echo each other (Bryant 2016). Likewise, the recurrent ruptures cannot be understood only as a repetitive joyous celebration of the new (see Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma, this volume), but are first and foremost the dire consequence of the fact that although my interlocutors

and their parents did manage to introduce radical changes to the enduring colonial history, they have not managed to circumvent it – yet.

By way of conclusion, I suggest that if we want to understand the current turn of the world with its populist and religious movements (see also Greenhouse and Pedersen, this volume), it might be helpful not to think of rupture as singular but rather as the outcome of contrapuntal rhythms. Not only because we might learn from the past, but first and foremost because it might help us to recognize what indeed is new.

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Notes

1. All names used in this article are aliases to secure the anonymity of the participants.
2. *Jihad* means 'to struggle in the way of Allah'.
3. In this chapter I treat God as an object equivalent to other objects, such as the welfare state. I do so because it reflects how my interlocutors experience the world. As Jon Bialecki writes in relation to Christian charismatic evangelism, God is an object by way of how people refer to him and rely on him (2017, 77), and, I would add, by way of the effects and affects that my interlocutors believe he causes. See also Amira Mittermaier (2011, 28; 2012, 256) for a similar approach and Bialecki (2014) for a critique of 'methodological atheism'. Furthermore, my interlocutors believe that the anasheed, like the Quran, reveal the word of God.
4. My interlocutors are very much in line with Stoler's (2016) understanding of recurring colonial durabilities. For instance, the Syrian secular regime's dictatorship and suppression of its citizens and Islamist opposition has led my interlocutors to consider it on a par with previous secular colonial rule and aligned with contemporary imperialist regimes (see also Gartenstein-Ross and Vassefi 2012, 835).
5. As creator, Allah necessarily stands outside creation. But Allah is also present in creation, acting in it and directing it, as the Quran explains at length (personal communication with Professor Mark Sedgwick and the interlocutor Khaled).
6. My interlocutors use the Danish term *mirakel* (miracle). However, if requested they would translate it into the Arabic *muajiza*.
7. When I have chosen this Christian-inspired theoretical framework anyway, it is first and foremost because the jihadist interlocutors to a certain extent conceive of the Arab Spring as a disruptive event along the lines of Badiou's understanding; and because the ethnography in noticeable ways resonates with descriptions of Christian conversions (especially within Pentecostalism), reflecting how my interlocutors are not only influenced by Islam but equally by Christianity and popular culture (cf. Larkin 2008). See also Saba Mahmood, who writes that despite the fact that the Islamic piety movement is antagonistic toward secularism, it presupposes many secular concepts and is far more hybrid than its participants will acknowledge (Mahmood 2012, xv).
8. In *Difference and Repetition* (2009) Gilles Deleuze distinguishes between two kinds of repetitions: repetitions of the same, which he refers to as 'material repetitions' (2009, 24), and repetitions that involve a difference and thereby pave way for the new.

9. Several online studies have been carried out, though (see for instance Navest et al. 2016), as well as ethnographic studies among jihadist families (see for instance van San 2018).
10. Mittermaier describes how her Egyptian Sufi interlocutors believe that the uprising was driven by a divine force; that it was God who moved the people to dispose of Hosni Mubarak (2017; see also Gartenstein-Ross and Vassefi 2012, 835).
11. Elizabeth Povinelli's work is dedicated to an anthropology of the otherwise, to describing 'forms of life that are at odds with dominant, and dominating, modes of being' (Povinelli 2011a, 1). Based on fieldwork among aboriginals in Australia, she analyses alternative potentialities of social existence to the current 'settler late liberalism' (Povinelli 2016, 18). In a similar way, the jihadist interlocutors are experimenting with forms of life that are otherwise to (and transcend) what they perceive as the dominant imperialist and capitalist mode of governance.
12. The Palestinian revolution (*al-thawra*) lasted from 1969 to 1982. It consisted of a number of Palestinian popular uprisings that succeeded in liberating the refugee camps in Lebanon and paved the way for the Cairo Agreement, which handed over control of the camps from the Lebanese government to the Palestine Liberation Organization.
13. In 2016, ten people with gang connections were killed. In 2017, 25 people were wounded and three killed in the so-called gang war. In comparison, ten people with gang connections were killed between 2008 and 2013 (Lauritzen and Dreyer 2016).
14. Mahmood also partly describes the Islamic revival of the 1970s as a response to the failure of postcolonial Arab regimes (2012, xi). In a very different context, that of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria, Ruth Marshall describes the Pentecostal revival as a response to postcolonial radical insecurity and the related unreliability of human relations (2010, 216; 2009, 3).
15. Along similar lines, Marshall writes that Christian conversions are seen as a way of hastening the fulfilment of God's plan (2009, 66).

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